

# **Mike Wallace interviews Ayn Rand**

**Henry Imler**

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**Mike Wallace:** This is Mike Wallace with another television portrait from our gallery of colorful people. Throughout the United States small pockets of intellectuals have become involved in a new and unusual philosophy, which would seem to strike at the very roots of our society. The fountainhead of this philosophy is a novelist Ayn Rand. Whose two major works *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* have been best sellers. We'll try to find out more about her revolutionary creed and about Miss Rand herself in just a moment.

**Mike Wallace:** And now to our story. Down through history various political and philosophical movements have sprung up but most of them have died. Some, however, like Democracy or Communism, take hold and affect the entire world. Here in the United States perhaps the most challenging and unusual new philosophy has been forged by a novelist, Ayn Rand. Miss Rand's point of view is still comparatively unknown in America, but if it ever did take hold it would revolutionize our lives.

**Mike Wallace:** And, Ayn, to begin with... I wonder if I can ask you to capsuleize... I know this is difficult... Can I ask you to capsuleize your philosophy? What is Randism?

**Ayn Rand:** First of all, I do not call it Randism, and I don't like that name. I call it Objectivism. Meaning a philosophy based on objective reality. Now let me explain it as briefly as I can.

**Ayn Rand:** First my philosophy is based on the concept that reality exists as an objective absolute. That man's mind, reason, is his means of perceiving it. And that men need a rational morality. I am primarily the creator of a new court of morality which has so far been believed impossible. Namely, a morality not based on faith, not on arbitrary whim, not on emotion, not on arbitrary edict, mystical or social, but on reason. A morality which can be proved by means of logic. Which can be

demonstrated to be true and necessary. Now may I define what my morality is, because this is merely an introduction.

**Ayn Rand:** My morality is based on man's life as a standard of value. And since man's mind is his basic means of survival, I hold that if man wants to live on earth, and to live as a human being, he has to hold reason as an absolute. By which I mean, that he has to hold reason as his only guide to action. And that he must live by the independent judgment of his own mind. That his highest moral purpose is the achievement of his own happiness. And that he must not force other people nor accept their right to force him. That each man must live as an end in himself and follow his own rational self-interest.

**Mike Wallace:** May I interrupt now?

**Ayn Rand:** You may.

**Mike Wallace:** Because you put this philosophy to work in your novel *Atlas Shrugged*. You demonstrate it, in human terms, in your novel *Atlas Shrugged*. And let me start by quoting from a review of this novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, that appeared in News Week. It said that, "You are out to destroy almost every edifice in the contemporary American way of life. Our Judeo-Christian religion our modified government regulated capitalism, our rule by the majority will." Other reviews have said that, "You scorn churches, and the concept of God." Are these accurate criticisms?

**Ayn Rand:** Ah.. Yes... I agree with the fact, but not the estimate of this criticism. Namely, if I am challenging the base of all these institutions, I'm challenging the moral code of altruism. The precept that man's moral duty is to live for others. That man must sacrifice himself to others. Which is the present day morality.

**Mike Wallace:** What do you mean by "sacrifice himself for others"? Now were getting to the point.

**Ayn Rand:** Since I'm challenging the base, I necessarily will challenge

the institutions you name, which are a result of that morality. And now what is self-sacrifice?

**Mike Wallace:** Yes...What is self-sacrifice? You say that you do not like the altruism by which we live. You like a certain kind of Ayn Randist selfishness.

**Ayn Rand:** I will say that, "I don't like" is too weak a word. I consider it evil. And self-sacrifice is the precept that man needs to serve others, in order to justify his existence. That his moral duty is to serve others. That is what most people believe today.

**Mike Wallace:** Yes...Were taught to feel concern for our fellow man. To feel responsible for his welfare. To feel that we are, as religious people might put it, children under god, and responsible one for the other. Now why do you rebel? What's wrong with this philosophy?

**Ayn Rand:** But that is in fact what makes man a sacrificial animal. That man must work for others, concern himself with others, or be responsible for them. That is the role of a sacrificial object. I say that man is entitled to his own happiness. And that he must achieve it himself. But that he cannot demand that others give up their lives to make him happy. And nor should he wish to sacrifice himself for the happiness of others. I hold that man should have self-esteem.

**Mike Wallace:** And cannot man have self-esteem if he loves his fellow man? What's wrong with loving your fellow man? Christ, every important moral leader in man's history, has taught us that we should love one another. Why then is this kind of love in your mind immoral?

**Ayn Rand:** It is immoral if it is a love placed above oneself. It is more than immoral, it's impossible. Because when you are asked to love everybody indiscriminately. That is to love people without any standard. To love them regardless of whether they have any value or any virtue, you are asked to love nobody.

**Mike Wallace:** But in a sense, in your book you talk about love as if it

were a business deal of some kind. Isn't the essence of love, that it is above self-interest?

**Ayn Rand:** Well, let me make it concrete for you. What would it mean to have a love above self-interest? It would mean, for instance, that a husband would tell his wife, if he were moral according to the conventional morality, that I am marrying you just for your own sake, I have no personal interest in it, but I'm so unselfish, that I am marrying you only for your own good. Would any woman like that?

**Mike Wallace:** Should husbands and wives, Ayn, tally up at the end of the day and say, "Well now wait a minute, I love her if she's done enough for me today, or she loves me if I have properly performed my functions?"

**Ayn Rand:** No, you misunderstood me. That is not how love should be treated. I agree with you that it should be treated like a business deal. But every business deal has to have its own terms and its own kind of currency. And in love the currency is virtue. You love people, not for what you do for them, or what they do for you. You love them for their values, their virtues, which they have achieved in their own character. You don't love causes. You don't love everybody indiscriminately. You love only those who deserve it.

**Mike Wallace:** And then if a man is weak, or a woman is weak, then she is beyond, he is beyond love?

**Ayn Rand:** He certainly does not deserve it, he certainly is beyond. He can always correct it. Man has free will. If a man wants love he should correct his weaknesses, or his flaws, and he may deserve it. But he cannot expect the unearned, neither in love, nor in money, neither in method, nor spirit.

**Mike Wallace:** You have lived in our world, and you realize...recognize...the fallibility of human beings. There are very few us then in this world, by your standards, who are worthy of love.

**Ayn Rand:** Unfortunately.... yes... very few. But it is open to everybody, to

make themselves worthy of it and that is all that my morality offers them. A way to make themselves worthy of love, although that's not the primary motive.

**Mike Wallace:** Let's move ahead. How does your philosophy translate itself into the world of politics? Now one of the principle achievements of this country in the past 20 years, particularly, I think, most people agree, is the gradual growth of social and protective legislation based on the principle that we are our brothers keepers. How do you feel about the political trends of the United States, the Western world?

**Ayn Rand:** The way everybody feels except more consciously. I feel that it is terrible, that you see destruction all around you, and that you are moving toward disaster, until, and unless, all those welfare state conceptions have been reversed and rejected. It is precisely these trends which are bringing the world to disaster, because we are now moving towards complete collectivism or socialism. A system under which everybody is enslaved to everybody, and we are moving that way only because of our altruist morality.

**Mike Wallace:** Ah...Yes, but you say everybody is enslaved to everybody, yet this came about democratically, Ayn. A free people in a free country, voted for this kind of government, wanted this kind of legislation. Do you object to the democratic process?

**Ayn Rand:** I object to the idea that the people have the right to vote on everything. The traditional American system was a system based on the idea that majority will prevailed only in public or political affairs. And that it was limited by inalienable individual rights, therefore I do not believe that a majority can vote a man's life, or property, or freedom away from him. Therefore, I do not believe that if a majority votes on any issue, that this makes the issue right, it doesn't.

**Mike Wallace:** All right, then how do we arrive at action? How should we arrive at action?

**Ayn Rand:** By voluntary consent, voluntary cooperation of free men,

unforced.

**Mike Wallace:** And how do we arrive at our leadership? Who elects, who appoints?

**Ayn Rand:** The whole people elects. There is nothing wrong with the democratic process in politics. We arrive at it the way we arrived by the American Constitution as it used to be. By the constitutional powers, as we had it, people elect officials, but the powers of those officials, the powers of government are strictly limited. They will have no right to initiate force or compulsion against any citizen, except a criminal. Those who have initiated force will be punished by force, and that is the only proper function of government. What we would not permit is the government to initiate force against people who have hurt no one, who have not forced anyone. We would not give the government, or the majority, or any minority, the right to take the life or the property of others. That was the original American system.

**Mike Wallace:** When you say, "take the property of others," I imagine that you are talking now about taxes.

**Ayn Rand:** Yes I am.

**Mike Wallace:** And you believe there should be no right by the government to tax. You believe that there should be no such thing as welfare legislation, unemployment compensation, regulation during times of stress, certain kinds of rent controls, and things like that.

**Ayn Rand:** That's right. I'm opposed to all forms of control. I am for an absolute laissez-faire, free, unregulated economy. Let me put it briefly. I'm for the separation of state and economics. Just as we had separation of state and church, which led to peaceful co-existence among different religions, after a period of religious wars, so the same applies to economics. If you separate the government from economics, if you do not regulate production and trade, you will have peaceful cooperation, and harmony, and justice among men.

**Mike Wallace:** You are certainly enough of a political scientist to know that certain movements spring up in reaction to other movements. The labor movement for instance, certain social welfare legislation. This did not spring full blown from somebody's head. I mean, out of a vacuum. This was a reaction to certain abuses that were going on, isn't that true, Ayn?

**Ayn Rand:** Not always, it actually sprang up from the same source as the abuses. If by abuses you mean the legislation which, originally, had been established to help industrialists, which was already a breach of complete free enterprise. If then, in reaction labor leaders get together to, initiate legislation to help labor, that is only acting on the same principle. Namely, all parties agreeing that it is proper for the state to legislate in favor of one economic group or another. What I'm saying is that nobody should have the right, neither employers nor employees, to use state compulsion and force for their own interests.

**Mike Wallace:** When you advocate completely unregulated economic life in which every man works for his own profit, you're asking in a sense for a devil take the high most, dog eat dog society, and one of the main reasons for the growth of government controls was to fight the robber barons, to fight laissez-faire, in which the very people whom you admire the most, Ayn, the hard-headed industrialists, the successful men, perverted the use of their power. Is that not true?

**Ayn Rand:** No it isn't. This country was made not by robber barons, but by independent men, by industrialists, who succeeded on sheer ability. By ability, I mean without political force, help, or compulsion. But at the same time there were men, industrialists, who did use government power as a club to help them against competitors. They were the original collectivists. Today, the liberals believe that the same compulsion should be used against the industrialists for the sake of workers, but the basic principle there is, "Should there be any compulsion?" And the regulations are creating robber barons, they are creating capitalists with government help, which is the worst of all economic phenomenon.

**Mike Wallace:** Ayn, I think that you will agree with me when I say that



you do not have a good deal of respect for the society in which you and I currently live. You think that we're going down hill fairly fast. Now I would like you to think about this question, and you'll have a minute intermission to ponder it and then come back and answer it, "Do you predict dictatorship and economic disaster for the United States if we continue on our present course?" Do you? And we'll get Ayn Rand's answer in just a moment.

**Mike Wallace:** And now back to our story. All right, Ayn Rand, what I'd like to know is this, since you describe it as happening in your novel *Atlas Shrugged*, do you actually predict dictatorship and economic disaster for the United States?

**Ayn Rand:** If the present collectivist trend continues, if the present anti-reason philosophy continues, yes, that is the way the country is going. But, I do not believe in historical determinism, and I do not believe that people have to go that way. Men have the free will to choose and to think. If they change their thinking we do not have to go into dictatorship.

**Mike Wallace:** Yes, but how can you expect to reverse this trend, when, as we've said, the country is run by majority rule, through ballot, and that majority seems to prefer to vote for this modified welfare state?

**Ayn Rand:** Oh...I don't believe that. You know as well as I do that the majority today has no choice. The majority has never been offered a choice between controls and freedom.

**Mike Wallace:** How do you account for the fact that an almost overwhelming majority of the people, who are regarded as our leading intellectuals, and our leading industrialists, the men whom you seem to admire the most, the men with the muscle and the money, favor the modified capitalism that we have today?

**Ayn Rand:** Ah...because it is an intellectual issue. Since they all believe in collectivism, they do favor it, but the majority of the people has never been given a choice. You know that both parties today are for socialism, in effect, for controls, and there is no party, there are no voices, to offer

an actual, pro-capitalist, laissez-faire, economic freedom, and individualism. That is what this country needs today.

**Mike Wallace:** Isn't it possible that they all, we all, believe in it because we are all basically lonely people, and we all understand that we are basically our brothers keepers?

**Ayn Rand:** You couldn't say that you really understand it, because there is no way in which you could justify it. Nobody has ever given a reason why men should be their brother's keepers, and you've had every example, and you see the examples around you, of men perishing by the attempt to be their brother's keepers.

**Mike Wallace:** You have no faith in anything.

**Ayn Rand:** Faith....no.

**Mike Wallace:** Only in your mind.

**Ayn Rand:** That is not faith. That is a conviction. Yes..... I have no faith at all. I only hold convictions.

**Mike Wallace:** Who are you, Ayn Rand? When I say that, I would like to know just a little bit of your vital statistics. You have an accent, which is?

**Ayn Rand:** Russian.

**Mike Wallace:** You were born in Russia?

**Ayn Rand:** Yes.

**Mike Wallace:** Came here?

**Ayn Rand:** Oh, about 30 years ago.

**Mike Wallace:** And whence did this philosophy of yours come?

**Ayn Rand:** Out of my own mind, with the sole acknowledgement of a debt to Aristotle, who is the only philosopher that ever influenced me. I devised the rest of my philosophy myself.

**Mike Wallace:** Your parents; did they die in Russia, or did they come here to the United States?

**Ayn Rand:** No, I came here alone, and I don't know, I have no way of finding out, whether they died or not.

**Mike Wallace:** You are married?

**Ayn Rand:** Yes.

**Mike Wallace:** Your husband, is he an industrialist?

**Ayn Rand:** No. He's an artist. His name is Frank O'Conner. He paints. No, he's not a writer.

**Mike Wallace:** Does he live from his painting?

**Ayn Rand:** He's just beginning to study painting. He was a designer before.

**Mike Wallace:** Is he supported in his efforts by the state?

**Ayn Rand:** Most certainly not.

**Mike Wallace:** He's supported by you for the time being?

**Ayn Rand:** No, by his own work, actually, in the past. By me if necessary, but that isn't quite necessary.

**Mike Wallace:** There is no contradiction here, in that you help him?

**Ayn Rand:** No, because you see I am in love with him selfishly. It is to my own interest to help him if he ever needed it. I would not call that a

sacrifice, because I take selfish pleasure in it.

**Mike Wallace:** Let me put one specific case to you. Suppose under your system of self-sufficiency, one single corporation were to get a stranglehold on a vital product, or a raw material, uranium for instance, which might be vital to the national defense, and then would refuse to sell it to the government. Then what?

**Ayn Rand:** Under a free system no one could acquire a monopoly on anything. If you look at economics, and economic history, you will discover that all monopolies have been established with government help, with the help of franchises, subsidies, or any kind of government privileges. In free competition no one could corner the market on a needed product. History will support me.

**Mike Wallace:** There is a deposit of uranium in Nevada, it's the only one in the United States, and it's our only access to that, and for self-defense we need this. Whereas, let's say in the Soviet Union, the state is able to command that. And if kind of a strange man, of strange beliefs, got a hold of this uranium, and said, "I will not sell this uranium to my government." He should not be forced by the government (according to your philosophy) to sell that uranium?

**Ayn Rand:** But you realize, that you are setting up an impossible fantasy. That is, if you are talking of any natural resource, that is vitally needed, it could not become vitally needed if it were that scarce. Not scarce to the point where one man could control all of it. So long as (I'm using your example) if a natural resource exists in more than one place in the world, no one man is going to control it.

**Mike Wallace:** All right, let's take another. How do we build roads, sanitation facilities, hospitals, schools? If you are not...If the government is not permitted to force, if you will, by vote, taxation, we have to depend upon the trickle down theory, upon the noblesse oblige, the largess.

**Ayn Rand:** I will answer you by asking you a question. Who pays for all those things?

**Mike Wallace:** All of us pay for these things.

**Ayn Rand:** When you admit that you want to take money, by force, from someone and ask me how are we going to build hospitals, or roads. You admit that someone is producing the money, the wealth, that will make those roads possible. Now, you have no right to tell the man who produced the wealth, in what way you want him to spend it. If you need his money, you can obtain it only by his voluntary consent.

**Mike Wallace:** And you believe in the eventual good will of all human beings, or at least that top echelon of human beings, whom you believe will give willingly...

**Ayn Rand:** No good will is necessary, only self-interest. I believe in private roads, private post offices, private schools.

**Mike Wallace:** When industry breaks down momentarily, and there is unemployment, we should not be permitted to get unemployment insurance, social security we do not need. We'll depend upon the self-interest of these enlightened industrialists whom you so admire, to take care of things when the economy needs a little lubrication and there are millions of people out of work.

**Ayn Rand:** Study economics, a free economy will not break down. All depressions are caused by government interference, and the cure is always offered, so far, to take more of the poisons that caused the disaster. Depressions are not a result of a free economy.

**Mike Wallace:** Ayn, one last question, we only have about a half a minute. How many Randists, you don't like the word, I beg your pardon.

**Ayn Rand:** Objectivists.

**Mike Wallace:** How many objectivsts would you say they are in the United States?

**Ayn Rand:** It's hard to estimate, but I can tell you some figures. My best intellectual heir, Nathaniel Brandon, a young psychologist, is giving a series of lectures on my philosophy in New York. He has received 600 letters of inquiry within the month of January. He is giving these lectures and attendance is growing in geometrical proportion.

**Mike Wallace:** Ayn, I'm sure that you have stimulated a good many people, more people than you already have, to read your book *Atlas Shrugged*, and *The Fountainhead*, and I'm equally sure they will be stimulated for the reading, indeed, if they do not agree.

**Ayn Rand:** Thank you.

**Mike Wallace:** Thank you very much.

**Mike Wallace:** I'll be back in a moment with my personal footnote to the story of Ayn Rand.

**Mike Wallace:** As we said at the outset, "If Ayn Rand's ideas were ever to take hold, they would revolutionize the world." And to those who would reject her philosophy, Miss Rand hurls this challenge. She has said, "For the past 2000 years the world has been dominated by other philosophies. Look around you, consider the results." We thank Ayn Rand for adding her portrait to our gallery. One of the people other people are interested in. Mike Wallace...Good Bye.